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## From Geopolitical Chance to Security Threat: Polish Public Political Discourse on the One Belt One Road Initiative

**Abstract:** This article deals with public, political discourse over One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative in Poland. OBOR has recently become very popular in Poland as it encapsulates the noticeable fascination on China and on geopolitics among parts of Polish society. This article describes this phenomenon and delaminates the mainstream political discourse over OBOR into two main strands: great geopolitical and/or geoeconomic chance (pro-OBOR discourse) and security threat (anti-OBOR). The advocates of the former see the project as a great geopolitical and economic opportunity for Poland; the supporters of the latter find it a threat to Polish security and/or economic interests. This discourse echoes internal divisions within current Polish government on its China policy and can be observed against the background of China's dynamic enter to Central and Eastern Europe, particularly to Czech Republic, Hungary and Serbia.

**Keywords:** *OBOR; New Silk Road; Sino-Polish relations; geopolitics; geoeconomics*

### Introduction

Judging by the number of articles in the media and in internet, by number of lectures and short films on You Tube and by frequency of mentioning it in political discussions, China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative has recently become popular in Poland. It encapsulates the noticeable fascination on China and on geopolitics among parts of Polish society. The mainstream Polish political discourse on China can be divided into two strands: pro-OBOR enthusiast who see the project as a great geopolitical and/or geoeconomic chance for Poland. And anti-OBOR critics who

undermine its importance and argue that this project threatens or might threaten Polish security. The divisions between those two discourses widened when top Polish politicians became engaged in the debate.

This article will try to present Polish public political discourse on OBOR initiative. The need for this article aroused from a demand for academic systematization of knowledge about OBOR in Poland: so far this topic has been covered by traditional media and internet only, with very few academic articles about Poland on OBOR (and – to my best knowledge – none on Polish discourse on OBOR). Thus, it should be the first article of such kind. It will try to answer the following research question: how OBOR is being portrayed in Polish discourse? What are the main strands of the OBOR narrative? What are the main arguments for and against embracing OBOR idea by Poland? Whether it is possible to put discourse on OBOR down to the Polish political context? Who controls or at least influences this discourse?

As for theoretical part, the most important terms should be clarified. Discourse, or “a speech or piece of writing about a particular, usually serious, subject” (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2017), will be understood here in the political science’s understanding of it (without linguistic focus on the discourse itself: this article set itself a modest task, without delving into complicated nature of what lies ‘beyond the sentence boundary’ and managing the systematic account of the discursive structures). Thus, political discourse, (by definition, “articulation of information on policies and actions for the public good”, Wilson, 2003), will be understood here as a narrative, or group of narratives, that function in the public debate and presents different strands of the public opinion. Hence, the political discourse is being concerned here with political contexts and political actors (Graber 1981, p. 195); such as politicians, political institutions, governments, political media, and political supporters operating in political environments to achieve political goals (Wilson, 2003). Although the vast bulk of studies of political discourse is about the text and talk of professional politicians or political institutions, politicians are not the only participants in the domain of politics (van Dijk 1997, p. 13). That is why this this article will not limit itself to examine the quotations of politicians only, but will also include voices from political analysts and academicians, as when they wish to present a political case they become, in one sense, political actors, and their own discourse becomes, therefore, political (Wilson, 2003). Finally, in executing political discourse analysis in political science this article will draw from Teun van Dijk’s findings that discourse analysis allows to see the relations between politics, media and public opinion: “who controls public discourse, at least partly controls the public mind” (van Dijk 1997 p. 44)

As for OBOR itself, or, to be correct, Silk Road Economic Belt/Corridor (later: One Belt One Road) Initiative was announced by the Chinese President Xi Jinping

in Astana, on September 7, 2013. Despite modest beginnings, with time, the OBOR concept grew in importance. It became not only a plan for creating a network of infrastructural connections), but, “throughout 2014, the concept gradually came to be the pivotal issue in China’s foreign policy and, to a lesser extent, in its domestic policy (...) “a versatile instrument of Chinese policy”, in both the regional and global dimensions (Kaczmarek, 2015). Its echoes reached Poland in 2014/2015 and became popular in late 2015/early 2016.

This came against the background of change of attitude towards China in Poland. The impressive economic development of China for long remained socially unnoticed in Poland: only a few people were interested in Chinese affairs (usually from academic/expert circles). Thus, such issues as violating of human rights in China or Tibet constituted the mass media image of China and dominated in the social consciousness of the Middle Country in Poland. It has started to change gradually, from the bottom, thanks to individual contacts, small businesses, travel, tourism etc. It has been complemented by the growing fascination of China among Polish conservative circles (the reasons for his social phenomenon still need to be researched). Politically speaking, the first important right-wing intellectual who proposed political rapprochement with China was Antoni Dudek from Jagiellonian University (Dudek, 2009). His voice, however, came too early, in 2009, and was limited to academic and expert circles. That is why growing interest in China was capitalized much more effectively by Janusz Korwin-Mikke, a highly controversial, far-right Polish politician (see for example: Korwin-Mikke, 2013). Growing interest in China went hand in hand with equally dynamic fascination in geopolitics that won the hearts and minds of many Polish people (especially young and conservative). The latter has been best illustrated by a dialogue in popular TV programme *Młodość kontra* (The Youths Versus), where Joanna Scheuring – Wielgus a prominent politician from the opposition part, *Nowoczesna*, was asked by a young activist from right-wing Nationalist Party about her opinion on the growing Sino-American rivalry and Poland’s position on it; Scheuring – Wielgus was clearly surprised and frankly said “I cannot reply because I don’t understand what you are talking about” (*Kompromitacja posłanki...*)

Against this social background political change occurred in Poland. The conservative PiS party (Law and Justice) won elections and formed the government. PiS in late 2015/2016 made a turn towards China which resulted in intensification on Sino-Polish relations, best illustrated by visits of Polish President Andrzej Duda in China in November 2015, Poland’s accession to Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in April 2016, and China’s Chairman Xi Jinping’s visit to Poland in June 2016. Since then China, and particularly its OBOR project, became the part of the mainstream political and media discourse in Poland.

As for methodology used here, for the sake of this article I have researched articles and programmes in all most important Polish media (press, online journals, TV and radio) in accordance with the ranking of “most frequently read titles” (regular ranking of daily newspapers and weekly journals, published by Wirtualne Media group, *Duży Spadek Czytelnictwa...*) plus I added Polish Radio and 3 most important Polish TV stations (TVP, Polsat and TVN) to the list as well as You Tube films (with at least 5000 displays). Full list of researched media is the following: I) daily newspapers: “Gazeta Wyborcza”, “Rzeczpospolita” and „Dziennik Gazeta Prawna”, II) tabloids: “Fakt”, “Super Express”; III) weekly journals “Polityka” “Wprost” “Do Rzeczy” “Gość niedzielny” “Newsweek” “W Sieci”, IV) online journals, “Obserwator finansowy” “Puls Biznesu” “Bankier”; “WPolityce” Money.PL; V) TV and Radio: “TVP” “Polskie Radio” “Polsat” and “TVN”, VI) You Tube.

I have singled out only those articles/programmes that deal with OBOR and Poland (thus, I excluded those that deal with OBOR only or those that deal with Sino-Polish relations but do not mention OBOR) and I did not mentioned agency news reprinted in the newspapers. Although while researching this topic I have tried to read/watch every articles/programme/commentary on OBOR in most important Polish media in the period of 2014–2017, I cannot claim to represent here all media news or all commentaries on OBOR. Rather, this article tries to present the most representative, influential and opinion-forming political voices about OBOR in Poland.

The chosen timeframe is from 2014 until 1 May 2017; the reason for choosing this timeframe is simple: 2014/2015 is roughly the first moment when OBOR idea went beyond academic circles in Poland; 1<sup>th</sup> May is the last moment when this article was upgraded.

Thus, the full quantitative data for this article is the following. I) Daily newspapers: “Gazeta Wyborcza” (2014: 0 articles on OBOR; 2015: 9 articles; 2016: 8 articles; 2017: 6 articles; the number on article on OBOR is slightly higher than in other most important daily newspapers as GW has its local brunches and articles from it counted together with articles in the main edition of this newspaper); “Rzeczpospolita” (2014 and 2015: 0 articles; 2016: 11 articles; 2017: 23 articles); “Dziennik Gazeta Prawna” (2014: 1 article; 2015: 10 articles; 2016: 14 articles; 2017: 5 articles); II) daily tabloids: “Fakt” (2015: 0 articles; 2016: 4 articles; 2017: 1 article); “Super Express” (2015: 1 articles; 2016: 2 articles; 2017: 1 articles); III) Weekly Journals: “Polityka” (2016: 1 article); “Wprost” (2014: 1 article; 2015: 6 articles; 2016: 12 articles; 2017: 1 article); “Do Rzeczy” (2016: 2 articles; 2017: 2 articles); “Gość niedzielny” (2015: 3 articles; 2016: 3 articles; 2017: 0 articles); “Newsweek” (2015: 1 article, 2016: 2 articles; 2017: 2 articles); “W Sieci” (0 articles); IV) online journals, “Obserwator

finansowy” (2015: 1 articles; 2016: 6 articles; 2017: 1 article); “Puls Biznesu” (2016: 6 articles); “Bankier” (2015: 7 articles; 2016: 10 articles; 2017: 4 articles); “WPolityce” (2014: 1 article, 2015: 6 articles; 2016: 12 articles; 2017: 1 article); Money.PL (2015: 21 articles; 2016: 16 articles; 2017: 3 articles); V. TV and Radio: “Polsat” and “TVN” – 0 programmes “TVP” (2015: 8 programmes; 2016: 14 programmes; 2017: 7 programmes), “Polskie Radio” (2015: 16 programmes; 2016: 9 programmes; 2017: 2 programmes; with Polish State TV – TVP and Polish State Radio – Polskie Radio as in the example of Gazeta Wyborcza the number of articles/programmes is higher than the average thanks to possession of regional brunches); VI) You Tube (2015: 3 films with at least 5000 displays; 2016: 15 films; 2017: 6 films).

Having examined this data, roughly two main streams of the public, political *China discourse* can be classified: the geopolitical chance and the security threat. The former dominated in late 2015/early 2016, whereas the latter is more popular since Autumn 2016.

### **Geopolitical and geoeconomic chance: the pro-OBOR discourse**

The optimistic discourse about OBOR can be called geopolitical chance as it combines these two elements. It is built on an idea that OBOR, thanks to its geopolitical importance, would bring Poland both political and economic benefits. The geopolitical voices were heard more loudly, thus they should be presented first.

The pivotal person in Polish geopolitical discourse on OBOR is a Warsaw lawyer Jacek Bartosiak affiliated in Potomac Foundation, Washington D.C., whose internet lectures on geopolitics became incredibly popular in 2015 and 2016 (around 100.000 visits, e.g., Jacek Bartosiak - o sytuacji Polski...) and his book, based on his PhD dissertation, “O Wojnie. Pacyfik i Eurasia (“On War. Pacific and Eurasia”) achieved the status of bestseller with more than 10.000 copies sold (*Kilkanaście tysięcy...*). Although Bartosiak’s theories are not much grounded in empirical evidences and are presented in the vague language of the geopolitics, the popularity of his views is a an intriguing socio-political factor that encapsulates Polish high hopes for country’s development and it’s place in the world.

Bartosiak believes that China’s enter to Central and Eastern Europe constitutes a great chance for Poland’s development. Using Wallerstein’s famous world theory concept, he claims that “creation of OBOR may change the economic and global order”; for him, China is a country that “went from periphery to semi-periphery” and “is on the good way to overthrow the entire global system” (Bartosiak 2016a, p. 354–355). By building the transcontinental infrastructure for the economic integration of the Eurasia from within, China will shift the locus of geopolitical power away

from the West and deep into Eurasia. In other words, China wants to overturn the global dominance of the West. This means reversal of the consequences of geographical discoveries and colonialism, or in plain language: the end of Western hegemony. Bartosiak compares this situation to the beginning of geographical discoveries, to the era of Christopher Columbus: “he came back from his journeys and tells his story, but his colleagues do not believe him and are being stuck in their (outdated) world outlook” (*Nowy Jedwabny Szlak budzi...*).

According to Bartosiak, OBOR will have a far-flung consequences for Poland. For him OBOR means a giant opportunity for the region to achieve „the third structural source of capital inflow” (after the first one in 1989 and second one in 2004) and the possibility of building a north- south transportation line (projects linking the Balkans with the Baltics, like Via Carpathia), which would help accumulate the capital in the region. According to him, the most important consequence of the Chinese projects in the region lies in overcoming structural obstacles that the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) faces in the current EU-dependent development (“the Chinese would help us do what the Germans don’t allow us to do”) (quoted in: Lubina, 2016). This in turn would not only help to accumulate the capital in the region but also may help to overcome the obstacles of present model of EU-dependent development which, although beneficial, has its own limitations for Poland (*Chiny przyszłością...*).

For Bartosiak, Chinese OBOR initiative would “put Poland as the first candidate to primacy; Poland’s economic potential created by cooperation within OBOR would then “affect all Eastern Europe and post-Soviet area” and “create enormous chances for development”. An “natural gravitation to Poland from all countries between Russia and Germany” would put them into Poland’s orbit. Subsequently, “this process would trigger a gradual gravitation towards Poland of the Scandinavian countries, encouraged by Polish economic role and its role as the unifier of the north-south and east-west axe”. As the result, “all Baltic-Black Sea belt would be exposed to Polish interests and would anchor the European margin of the OBOR, attracting trade from dynamic Asia; the regional states would orient themselves to Poland in the same way as we oriented ourselves on the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century to prosperity associated with European Union” (Bartosiak, 2016b).

Bartosiak’s visions are complemented by other enthusiast of OBOR initiative who present the economic, or geoeconomic opportunities combined with it. Those expectations are built on the belief in Poland’s ability to capitalize its transit position between China and Western Europe. It is hoped that Poland would become OBOR’s *gate* to the Western Europe: a potential regional hub. It could help to modernize the transportation base, particularly the railway lines (Szcudlik-Tatar, 2013). The “geopolitical/geoeconomic chance” discourse emphasized that Poland’s main asset is

its geographical location: thanks to convenient geography products going to Western Europe need to cross just two borders. Thus, geography makes Poland a natural transportation hub linking Europe with Asia. For example, Professor Bogdan Góralczyk, one of Poland's most famous sinologists, emphasizes Poland's key geographic location: "For Chinese – he writes – "Poland lies in the center of Europe and only this matters" (Góralczyk, 2017). "What had been our curse in the previous centuries – he adds in another place – that is, the location between Russia and Germany, has now become our geostrategic asset" (*Muru nie ma...*, 2016). Damian Wnukowski, analyst of PISM, Poland's MFA think tank, echoes this statement by saying "Poland, thanks to its geographic position, hopes for development of infrastructure and transportation links" (*Polska na chińskim...*, 2016). His optimism is shared by Grzegorz Fingas from Polish State Railway Corporation (PKP), who believes in Poland's chance "to become a regional hub that manages the trade volume between China and Western Europe, as Poland is on the crossroads of Baltic and Adriatic and Black Sea routes" (*Nowy Jedwabny Szlak...*, 2016). This argument concludes that by taking advantage of its convenient geographic position Poland could, therefore, become the Western terminal for Chinese goods, which would translate into massive Chinese grants, loans and investments (Szcudlik-Tatar, 2013).

Another advantage would be linking Poland economically with Western China (Sichuan, Gansu, Xinjiang, Ninxia provinces), where there is a potential for Polish investments, particularly in mining, petrochemical, environmental protection, biomedical, pharmaceutical, green technologies, agriculture processing, chemicals, and others (Ibid.). Stronger ties with Western China mean a chance for increasing trade volume and increasing share of Polish export in it (*Polskie firmy...*, 2016). This should be possible thanks to cargo Chengu-Łódź train that connects those two cities in 12 days, much faster than the maritime trade (40–50 days) much cheaper than air cargo. According to Góralczyk, this "can make Łódź a logistic-communication centre for all Europe" (*Lekcje polsko...*, 2017). Alongside with Łódź plans exists those of establishing a handling centre for goods moving in both directions and/or link the container terminal in Małaszewicze near the Belarusian border with the project the Chengdu-Łódź cargo rail may become one of Poland's main economic assets in the OBOR idea. (Szcudlik-Tatar, 2013). There are also ambitious plans to make Biała Podlaska a transit centre for Chinese goods, connected with Pomerania Special Economic Zone that dreams to become a regional hub thanks to "China connection" (Grzegorzcyk, 2017)

This discourse claims, too, that increasing Poland's profile on the OBOR route would translate into trade opportunities with Central Asian and Southeast Asian countries. One of the authors claims that although Poland is economically too weak

in comparison with Western European countries, it is much stronger than China's Western and Southern neighbours; thus, OBOR offers chances for Polish investor on the Central Asian (infrastructure) and Southeast Asian (commercial goods) markets (Stankiewicz, 2016). According to Radosław Pyffel, Poland's Alternate Director of China's *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank* (AIIB), OBOR offers chance for Polish investors to find themselves in Asia, the new global economic centre: "it is in Asia where there will be the richest middle class, the most dynamic industry where the most original ideas will be born. In the past all roads led to Rome, now they will lead to Shanghai, Beijing, Seoul, New Delhi"; Pyffel says that Polish investors, particularly from construction industry should use this opportunity and enter the Asian markets which would be in accordance with the Morawiecki's plan that aims at stimulating Poland's foreign investments and improving their international profile (*Nowy Jedwabny Szlak. Wszystkie drogi...*, 2017). For him "in the last 25 years all Poland has been a construction site, but this is ending now and one needs to find alternative ways; today Asia is one, great construction site, particularly Central Asia, Middle East and Southeast Asia: it is there where bridges, ring roads, ports, airports and dams will be constructed: it is a huge market" (*Pyffel: AIIB...*, 2017).

Wnukowski echoes Pyffel's incentive for businessmen by emphasizing Poland's chances in such niches at the Chinese market as environmental technologies, medical and mining equipment, cosmetics, IT as well as taking opportunity of the burgeoning Chinese middle class and by offering it such luxurious goods as yachts, boats, and amber jewelry (*Polska na chińskim...*, 2016). Anna Antczak from Vistula Academy of Finance and Business adds innovations and patents to this list as well as renewable sources of energy, new technologies, transportation and construction.

Another stream of the chance/opportunity discourse shows Poland's opportunities in bilateral relations with China. Hence, Poland could benefit on cooperation with China in the energetic sphere: nuclear power (where it could provide sources for this project), coal (building new blocks in Ostrołęka energy plant and in Północ power station) and shale gas (cooperation in joint exploitation in the uneasy geologic field) (Jakóbiak, 2016a). This is supplemented by a potential Chinese share in building the Central Airport between Warsaw and Łódź (*Chińczycy pomogą zbudować...*, 2016).

Furthermore, the main argument of those advocating for strengthening cooperation with China is the chance for export of Polish agriculture products to China: pork, milk and apples. Here improved political relations are correctly seen as necessary for commercial success as Chinese market is being protected by a wide range of official and unofficial barriers that can be lifted via political means only (*Chiński minister...*, 2016).

There is also a significant hope of attracting Chinese students to Poland and developing Polish-Chinese scientific relations, advocated by Science and Higher Education Minister and deputy PM Jarosław Gowin (*Wicepremier Gowin...*, 2016). There are opportunities for cooperation in culture, technology and science spheres and Poland can offer a well-educated and mobile labor and entrepreneurship spirit of significant part of the society, particularly the young one (Antczak, 2017). Hence, the advocates of rapprochement with China and OBOR project see at a great “soft power” opportunity for promotion of Polish brands and trademarks on the OBOR route – establishing the “brand of Poland” as “a friendly, attractive country with great ambitions and capabilities” (Pałkiewicz, 2016).

Finally, the last argument of the pro-OBOR enthusiasm is based on the notion that if Poland does not use the opportunities of this initiative, then our neighbors, particularly Czech Republic and Hungary will do it. “There is a significant competition in Europe for Chinese investments; if Poland does not use it, then Hungary, Ukraine or Turkey will” writes Dominik Błędzki (*Polska nie wykorzystuje...*, 2017). Many follow this line of thinking. For example during the meeting of Council for Foreign Relations of the President of Poland before Xi Jinping’s visit this argument has been frequently used in favor for stronger rapprochement with China (Council meeting, 14.06.2016).

The enthusiastic, pro-OBOR narrative was supported by PiS Government in late 2015 – mid 2016. During 1+16 meeting in Suzhou in November President Duda called OBOR “a great chance” and proposed making Poland “China’s gate to Europe” (*Chcemy współpracować...*, 2015), while PM Beata Szydło, emphasizing our convenient geographic location and Łódź-Chengdu train in June 2016, called OBOR “a great possibilities and benefits for mutual development” (*Premier Szydło...*, 2016). The peak of official support came during Xi Jinping’s visit to Warsaw in June 2016. Afterwards, the official optimist started to wane and the critical voices gained prominence.

### **Security threat: the anti-OBOR discourse**

The optimistic discourse on OBOR in Poland has been challenged by a critical one. Opponents of engagement with China claim that China has been prematurely called global contender for hegemony: Beijing has too many domestic problems and too little innovative economy for that. Criticism on China is combined with skeptical approach to OBOR initiative and its alleged earthshaking consequences.

Apart from questioning the possibilities of land transportation replacing sea one (still only 1/30 of all Chinese export goes to Europe by rail), the critical discourse shows that only certain companies, such as the electronic companies, can benefit

on this cooperation. For others it makes little economic sense. That is why, OBOR is mostly a geopolitical, not economic initiative “which is its main weakness”; thus OBOR “will unlikely change the economic map of the world and certainly is not such an event as the great geographical discoveries that increased the importance of maritime trade” (Dąbrowski, 2016a, b)

The critical discourse presents OBOR initiative as a hidden goal of the China Communist Party’s attempt to resolve domestic problems via international means. As one critical analysts writes, China wants to defuse the overproduction in many segments of Chinese economy, such as steel works, shipbuilding industries, mining industry, steelworks industry, construction and construction materials, textiles and clothing industries (Sarek, 2016). According to another opinion, Beijing also wants to develop the Western provinces of China which does not automatically lead to the development of Poland as the railway transport is still not very important and unlikely to improve soon (Dąbrowski, 2016, b)

Aside for questioning the motives and consequences of OBOR, the critical discourse warns about negative consequences for Poland challenges in trade and the security spheres.

As for the former ones, it is emphasized that in some potentially perspective trade areas (furniture, the mechanical and electrical industry, shipbuilding, machine parts or IT) Poland has no chances in dealing with China. It is not only not a partner for China but worse – a competitor. According to this discourse, given Chinese industrial espionage, Polish-Sino cooperation in these areas may bring Poland more bad than good. Even in agriculture, the potential for export of Polish products is limited, be it for its size (much smaller than the one oriented to European countries) or for Chinese barriers (including for pork) due to “food security” policy. Furthermore, the critical discourse highlights China’s dislike for direct foreign investments greenfield type (there are many Chinese companies in Poland, but the overall volume of investments is low: below 500 million USD; most of this companies trade with China and employs Chinese people). Instead of investing in greenfield projects, Chinese prefer to take over the already functioning units, which is beneficial for the Chinese side but not necessary for those units. Chinese investments, too, may lead to political (national security) and economic (dominating the market, state’s losing of control over key technologies, industrial espionage) threats (Sarek, 2016).

As for OBOR itself, the criticism centers on “the need to differentiate investments from infrastructure contracts”; the latter apparently consist the essence of Chinese approach to OBOR project: „for Chinese money the Chinese companies will build railways for us, they will receive their payment, while Poland will have to give back this money to China (as any loan which must be returned). In the end, the money,

instead of staying in Poland, will come back to China” (Ibid.). Here the example of Laos and Thailand is presented, where, after initial enthusiasm for Chinese infrastructure projects these projects were suspended or canceled due to the negative impact on local economies. The critical discourse claims that the OBOR infrastructure contracts are needed for Beijing due to the slowdown of economy and possible bankruptcy of many companies: “foreign infrastructure contracts are a brilliant method of solving Chinese problems at the others’ expense”. The critical discourse claims that “Poland is not ready for China”. Polish state is unprepared for Chinese investments and will be exploited accordingly, in a much larger degree than it was in the beginning of 1990s when free market entered Poland (Ibid.).

If the some pro-OBOR advocates labels their intellectual opponents as people who do not understand the signs of time, then the critics of OBOR accuse supporters of this initiative of having a “pre-colonial mentality”, or “an attitude of the broadest cooperation at any cost, including sacrificing national security, in order to draw attention of the stronger partner that has a potential to dominate the relationship” (Jakóbk, 2016a). In this contexts the critics of OBOR accentuate China’s policy in Africa (economically dominated by China) and emphasize the comparisons with Central and Eastern Europe (Jakóbk, 2016, b) They, too, emphasize EU’s reservation about OBOR project by writing “EU can block the Silk Road” (*Bruksela może zablokować...*, 2017).

The critical discourse has gained supporters among the Poland’s Defense Ministry. Antoni Macierewicz, who already in 2015 (before his party won elections) called the OBOR initiative “a threat to Poland”, a project which is “a part of Chinese expansion, a cooperation between Western Europe, Russia and China to push the United States’ influence out of the region” and which “may lead to elimination of independent existence of Poland” (though he did not exclude cooperation on some economic projects (*Antoni Macierewicz o Nowym Jedwabnym Szlaku...*, 2015). Actions followed his words. In late 2016 his Defense Ministry has nullified the public bid for allotment in the center of Łódź. This well-located in the very heart of the city 33-hectar area belongs to Military Agency Property and was intended to become the reload center for the Łódź-Chengdu train (a special economic zone was even created to serve this purpose). There was a concrete buyer in sight: Hatrans, a Polish-Chinese joint venture (with dominant Chinese capital) that planned to upgrade this area to fill the increasing need for more trains on Łódź-Chengdu route. The Defense Ministry, however, has suspended the auction for this allotment again.

According to *Gazeta Wyborcza* newspaper, the Chinese considered it as a hostile action, closed their office and came back to China; thus Antoni Macierewicz “has killed” this perspective business and damaged the long years of regional Łódź politi-

cians attempt to attract Chinese investments there (Frąk, 2017). Other liberal media soon followed. “Newsweek Poland” commented that “Macierewicz sees OBOR as a conspiracy” and undermines it by blocking Polish-Chinese cooperation (*Nowy Jedwabny Szlak. Macierewicz...*, 2017). Oko.Press, founded by former Gazeta Wyborcza deputy editor-in-chief, even titled their article “Macierewicz ripped the New Silk Road” (Majmurek, 2017).

According to analyst Wojciech Jakóbiak from “Biznes Alert” Macierewicz has “pulled Poland out from the Silk Road”. Jakóbiak echoed opinions saying that this decision undermined Łódź politicians attempts to develop relations with China, but he justified it by alleged Chinese anti-Polish actions in Czech Republic. According to Jakóbiak, anti-Chinese actions of Macierewicz was a retaliation against the hostile actions of Chinese company J&T Finance Group (part of CEFC China Energy Company Limited) which compete with Poland’s state oil agency PKN Orlen in the Czech market. Jakóbiak writes that “increasing Chinese influences in Central and Eastern Europe benefits such pro-Russian politicians” in the region as Czech deputy PM Andrey Babisz who due to his personal conflict of economist interests struggles politically with PKN Orlen. Jakóbiak’s overall argument is that Chinese companies are simply a cover of Chinese secret services agencies which work hand in hand with the Russian ones to the detrimental of Polish interest in Central and Eastern Europe (Jakóbiak, 2017)

Jakóbiak continues his defense of Macierewicz by pointing out the so-far failures of Polish-Chinese cooperation. According to him, despite increasing diplomatic activity, the Polish-Sino cooperation has not yet bore fruit. China will not finance Polish atom energy project as this project losses ground to coal energy. In the latter China just wants to take over Polish power stations (such as Połaniec power station) without taking responsibility for their investments: “they just want to make money as the investments funds do and they do not want to go deeper”. Taking this into account, and in the circumstances of Poland being in NATO and EU, “the hopes of Warsaw-Beijing alliance should be considered in the realm of fantasy”; thus, according to Jakóbiak, Macierewicz has just done a *Coup de grace* to already problematic Polish-Sino cooperation (Ibid.).

Jakóbiak’s interpretation was challenged by Radosław Pyffel who accused Jakóbiak of using weak sources and lack of evidences; Pyffel understated the importance of Macierewicz’s actions by writing that Łódź is not the only place for Chinese investments in Poland and that the failure of acquiring one block does not automatically mean the failure of grand OBOR scheme (Pyffel, Facebook profile, 2017).

Macierewicz’s actions evoked public reactions from prominent politicians, too. Piotr Marzec, MP and deputy chairman of the Parliament Polish-China commission

from right-wing and often sympathetic to PiS government Kukiz Party, publicly asked the Development Ministry (headed by deputy PM, Morawiecki, a supporter of closer cooperation with China) whether they are still interested in the OBOR initiative; he also accused the Defense Ministry of “lack of understanding of geopolitical realities” (*Posel Liroy-Marzec...*, 2017).

Soon opposition politicians followed. Rafał Trzaskowski, PM from opposition party Platforma Obywatelska and former deputy foreign minister, during parliament’s discussion on the expose of current foreign minister, reminded the government of its earlier enthusiasm about OBOR and accused Macierewicz of “torpedoing all Chinese investments” (quoted in: *Antoni Macierewicz, zrobię wszystko...*, 2017). Macierewicz called these accusations „false” and „resulting from an Trzaskowski’s absolute incompetence”; he moved on by ensuring the parliament that “all necessary actions will be taken to make sure that the dry port in Łódź will be managed by a Treasury of State’s company, not by people of unknown *conduite*” (*Exposé Witolda Waszczykowskiego...*, 2017); (Macierewicz referred here to a widely unknown Chinese company New Silk Road Company Limited which possesses 49% of actions in in the Polish-Chinese company Euroasia Rail Terminal which plans to build the rail terminal, (*Nowy Jedwabny Szlak. Macierewicz...*, 2017). Macierewicz also emphasized that the investment in Łódź is important for him: “I will do whatever is necessary to guarantee the security of Polish state there and the fulfilment of this investment” (*Exposé Witolda Waszczykowskiego...*, 2017).

Macierewicz’s stance most probably reflects an internal split within PiS government between the supporters of rapprochement with China who represent the economic resorts (Morawiecki, Gowin) and the opponents of it from Defense Ministry who advocate stronger Polish-American ties and see Chinese influences as a threat more than a challenge (*Polska nie wykorzystuje...*, 2017). This split reflects the dual nature of Polish discourse on OBOR, between what can be called the *geopolitical dreamers* and *security keepers*.

What is also interesting in this discourse is the fact that it is challenging to put it down to the Polish political context as the lines of division are intertwined between two main political parties (ruling social-conservative PiS and opposition liberal-conservative PO) as well as other parties and their supporters. However, if one is forced to generalize, then these discourses would rather be more associated with right-wing politicians, intellectuals and supporters that are closer to PiS than to PO, but they represent different strands within mainstream conservative narrative about Poland and its place in the world. That is why it is much safer to group them not by their domestic divisions (be it party, class or ideology differences) but rather by their foreign policy orientation: more balanced one (*geopolitical dreamers*) and strident

pro-American one (*security keepers*). It is almost impossible, too, to tell who controls the Polish discourse on OBOR: it seems to be patch worked, done by individuals, bottom-to-top and uncontrolled by a single entity; judging by available, public sources it is impossible to tell who influenced which ideas (perhaps with other, non-public knowledge, it would be easier to do so); on the other hand it is much easier to point the beneficiaries of these two strands of Polish OBOR discourse: in case of *geopolitical dreamers* it is clearly China; in case of *security keepers* it is United States. As for Polish interests, all sides claim to represent it.

### **Summary: Great Plans, Little Results**

Both sides of the Polish discourse on OBOR as well as people who try to find middle ground between these two sides and foreign commentators in early 2017 seem to agree on one thing: despite much talk about grand opportunities for bilateral cooperation, so far little has been done on OBOR initiative in Poland and the Polish-Sino cooperation remains limited.

According to PAIIZ (Polish Agency of Information and Foreign Investments) in 2015 Chinese investments in Poland amounted to only about 90 million USD, while Polish in China – 130 million euro (Kublik, 2015). So far plans for the Chinese to become the strategic investor of Polish Airlines LOT or their share in the Central Airport, or even Polish-Sino satellite did not materialize. The same can be said about Chinese share in Polish energy plants, coal industry, atom energy or railway infrastructure. Poland, as before, is exporting agriculture goods mostly meat, chocolate, syrups and milk (Majmurek, 2017).

Despite improvement on the export of Polish apples and chickens to China (previously blocked by Chinese side), no significant Chinese investments in Poland are under way and PiS government, despite its vocal declaration did not develop significantly the economic relations with China. As Góralczyk writes, the Chinese seeing that relations on the central level are stalled, decided to move with investments to local level (Stalowa Wola, Kraśnik, Kutno, Opole, Chełm, Mława are most important examples of Chinese investments in provincial Poland); nevertheless, according to him, Polish dissidents are still not ready for the Chinese (Góralczyk, 2017).

Despite these local level investments, when taken overall and when judging by the perspective of February 2017, the OBOR initiative has not shaped the economic or (geo)political fundamentals of Poland. The supporters of OBOR as a geopolitical opportunity call it “a waste chance” (“inability to struck a reasonable balance between geopolitics and economic interests” Poland accordingly „is unable to set its strategic

goals and use the benefits from this project”, Antczak, 2017) while security keepers sigh with relief. The outcome of this situation for Poland remains to be seen.

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- Endnotes)

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